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William Boozer

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## Jesse Stuart: An Appreciation

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*William Boozer*

We turn from I-64 at Grayson, Kentucky onto State Route 1 and vertigo north into a land that has a voice. It is a dizzying experience, these hairpin and horseshoe curves. Signs warn of bumps ahead in the aging asphalt violated by man and weather. Two one-lane bridges lay traps for us in bends in the road.

Distractions are everywhere. One roadside marker sends us west to the grave of Lucy Virgin Downs, the first white child born west of the Alleghenies. Another sends us east to inspect an example of lost American architecture, the Oldtown covered bridge that has spanned the Little Sandy River since 1880.

We are in the hills of eastern Kentucky, with West Virginia and Ohio and the Ohio River just over the horizon. Historical markers know the directions of the compass in these parts, if all native sons do not. "We don't say east, west, north and south," says one. "We say up the hollow, down the hollow . . . turn left, turn right."

We go up the hollow and turn right again onto Route 1. The Little Sandy is on our right, where good fishing and baptizings have been going on since long before the first horse-drawn wagon crossed the Oldtown bridge into the sandy bottoms beyond. Little houses with tin roofs call up childhood memories of hypnotic sleep beneath the staccato of night rain on roofs like these in another Kentucky county; most people who sleep under tin roofs don't need sleeping pills. We dodge terrapins that take their time going no place except to the other side of the road. We wonder why terrapins are always crossing the road, never going up it or down.

We are in Greenup County. It is Jesse Stuart country, and it is a half century and more of Stuart work that has brought us here on a pilgrimage of students and teachers and just people to pay homage to this man who is the voice of this place, who listens to the wind and writes down what it says, whose kinship with Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman is pronounced in all that he writes. West Virginia's Ruel E. Foster says of him that "No other American writer today can call us so delightfully into the outdoor world."<sup>1</sup> Here is a man who celebrates the seasons, the land and people in a



never-ending poem of sun and moon and stars, wind and lonesome waters, of the bloodroot (percoon, as we know it from the Indians) that signals the coming of spring in these beautiful hills. And trees:

And far as eyes can see this land is mine . . .  
They all belong to me—gum, oak, and pine.<sup>2</sup>

And he sings repeatedly of the rabbit and fox and foxhounds, the squirrel, 'coon and 'possum. And snakes. Who else do we know whose love of land is so strong that he envies the snake for being forever so close to it?

Who and what exactly is this twentieth century Kentucky Thoreau who has published almost five hundred short stories, ten novels, more than twenty-one hundred poems, and several hundred articles and essays, most of them mined from these green-dark hills of home? Who has published fifty-two books. Who has appeared in two hundred twenty-five anthologies of American literature and fifteen hundred textbooks. Whose work is in thirty-two countries on six continents.

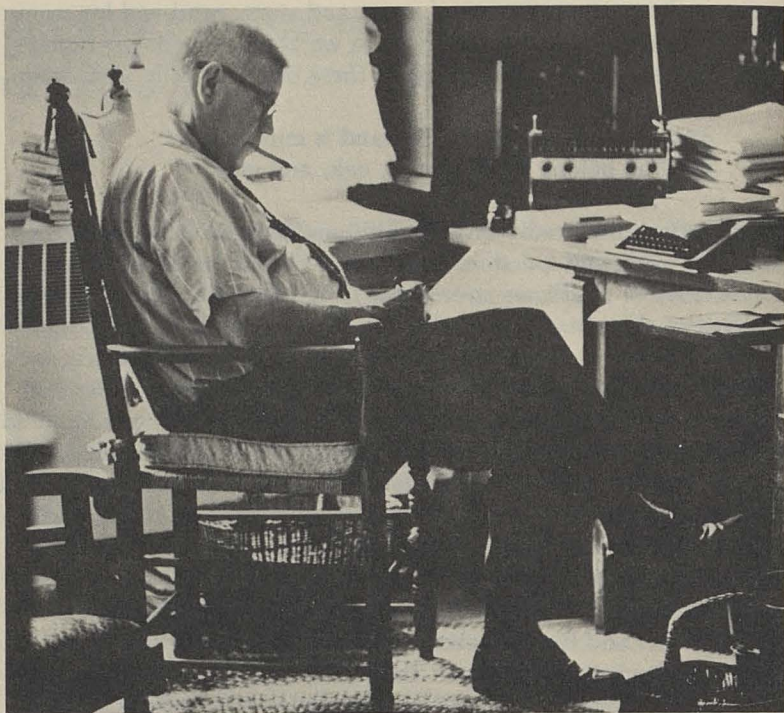
The answers come in torrents during a four-day symposium, "Jesse Stuart and the Greenbo Sessions." The place is the Jesse Stuart Lodge in Greenbo Lake State Resort Park, eight miles from the author's home in W-Hollow, near the county seat of Greenup. The sponsor is the Jesse Stuart Foundation, newly-formed in association with ten universities to oversee Stuart's large literary estate and to administer and protect as a nature preserve his one thousand acres of Appalachian hills and hollows.

No man we know enjoys people more than Jesse Stuart, nor relishes more the talk of books and writing, nor has more pride in recognition and accomplishment. Few people have come so far from such base poverty with such jut-jawed determination and hard work.

Not many are so in love with nature and living, with the seasons, especially spring that signals rebirth of growing things and which has come again to brush the landscape in pigments of red and yellow and white and green and every other color in the rainbows that touch these ridges and dales.

Stuart likes catfish and hushpuppies, too, the specialties of Doug Stephenson, the chef of Greenbo Park's kitchens, whose dining rooms, judging from Saturday night and Sunday lunch crowds, must be the best place to eat in the county, maybe several counties.





Jesse Stuart at home, W-Hollow, Greenup, Kentucky. Courtesy of Jesse Stuart and the Jesse Stuart Foundation

But when people are at Greenbo from as far as Texas and Oklahoma and California to participate with thirty-eight scholars and family members and neighbors in measure of the man and his work, Stuart cannot be there. At seventy-two, he has survived seven cardiac arrests and heart attacks—the first in 1954 at age forty-seven. As a young teacher, there were fisticuffs with students to establish who was king of the classroom. As a newspaper publisher, he rocked the boats of politics and education locally with firebrand editorials that clamored for change and earned for him a blindsided visit in a Greenup drugstore from a deputy constable who split Stuart's scalp open with a blackjack. He endures partial paralysis today from a March 1978 stroke. He can no longer read or write. But he remains the gifted conversationalist, interested as always in people's names and origins and their successes and heartbreaks. He is able to be out of bed and in a wheelchair for



thirty minutes each day, to sit in the backyard in good weather with his bluejays and Kentucky cardinals and pet woodchuck, listen to a woodpecker or an owl in a dead oak across the hollow, drink a cup of coffee, and smoke a cigar. Members of the Stuart symposium visit him there in what is the high point of the long weekend in Stuart country.

With Faulkner, Jesse Stuart has created his own universe, a fictional world whose people stand up and cast shadows. But his critical reception stays mixed. Some critics say he has written too much, plowing old ground too often. Some fault him for carelessness, such as signing the first sonnet in *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* "Yours very respectfully" instead of respectfully, which no editor has corrected in subsequent editions.

As long ago as March 1932, while Stuart was a graduate student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Allen Tate was writing Donald Davidson that it was obvious that Stuart "has some experience that he is trying to understand—a genuine problem; don't you think that this kind of integrity is a fine basis to work from?" But Tate could not use Stuart in a southern number of *Poetry* which he was editing. While recognizing some good qualities in Stuart's poetry ("In the longer pieces there are flashes"), Tate found Stuart's short poems lacking "the headlong freshness of some lines in the long, and are merely clumsy." Stuart had not learned that *lie* is not a transitive verb, "but he does have a genuine flair."<sup>3</sup>

Stuart's defenders today say that if you removed all the blunders from Stuart you wouldn't have Stuart, and that you could throw away all but two hundred of the short stories and you'd have left that many short story masterpieces. "When the definitive history of the American short story is written a hundred years hence," Foster says at Greenbo, "Jesse Stuart's name may well be near the top of the list of the best writers in this genre." The defenders call his work universal, a chronicle of the human predicament and a joyous affirmation of man.

Others dismiss him as merely regional, as Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon did in leaving him out of *The House of Fiction* in 1950. Tate would write Davidson this time that "I suppose prejudice explains our omission of Jesse Stuart. His dramatization of himself as the Hill-billy, for New York consumption, has disgusted me for years, and I suppose I can't be fair to his work."<sup>4</sup> The years didn't soften Tate's criticism of Stuart. During one of five visits we had with Tate over the last two years of his life, he said



Stuart is "a self-conscious regionalist who plays up local color and the peculiarities of mountain people." Tate died in 1979 ranking the work of another Kentucky mountain man, James Still, superior to that of Stuart.

Many Stuart observers find agreement today that Stuart has published too much because of his great love of the land and people and the craft of writing. All of his life he has looked ahead in horror to a day when he could write no more. So he has tried to put it all on the head of a pin, except his has been an old-fashioned hat pin with a large head, and he has often been in too much of a hurry. Too often, he has had poor editing. But he has had fun. Faulkner said he wrote to rid himself of demons. Stuart has not had that problem. He has written because he loves to write. He told us once that he has laughed so hard at times with something a character was saying or doing that he has had to get up from his typewriter and leave the room.

There was another house of fiction where Stuart went uninvited. *Esquire* magazine turned up its New Fiction nose to him when it published its fortieth anniversary issue in October 1973, bringing a storm of protest to publisher Arnold Gingrich. Gingrich himself protested in print. Had he (rather than two editors) made the selections, he wrote, he would have included his own favorite, Stuart's "Split Cherry Tree." That short story was one of eighty-nine Stuart appearances in *Esquire* (fifty-eight stories, twenty-nine poems and two articles)—more by-lined appearances than by any other writer. "Split Cherry Tree," Gingrich reported, had been anthologized more than one hundred and fifty times, more than Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." But Stuart's work was now "out of synch," said Gingrich, at a magazine which had included him in its thirty-fifth anniversary issue in October 1968 ("Our Sammie") and the Shaping of the Seventies issue, December 1969 ("Appalachian Suicide").

The Greenbo Sessions show that Tate and *Esquire* are not the last word on Stuart. Presiding over the sessions is Harold E. Richardson, Stuart biographer and chairman of the new Jesse Stuart Foundation. In a foreword to a 1979 University Press of Kentucky reprint of Stuart's second collection of short stories, *Men of the Mountains* (1941), Richardson writes that "The critical questions of Stuart's sometimes ragged style and heavy production aside . . . today's reader perceives that Stuart's work has survived."



Another Greenbo Sessions speaker, Californian Frederick B. Shroyer, finds that west of New York and east of Los Angeles there is a vast public that wants a literature that it is not now getting. So readers of all ages, children and graduate students and senior citizens, come to Stuart, as Richardson states, or return to him.

Others on the Greenbo program to pay tribute, with Foster and Richardson and Shroyer, include Kentucky historians Thomas D. Clark and Harry M. Caudill; Stuart scholars J. R. LeMaster, Frank H. Leavell and Wade H. Hall; Tennessee's Wilma Dykeman; Vanderbilt's Thomas Daniel Young; Clemson University's M. Thomas Inge; Western Kentucky University's Jim Wayne Miller and John Howard Spurlock, and Stuart bibliographer Hensley C. Woodbridge.

These and other speakers have done their homework. Some of them had read *Man With a Bull-Tongue Plow* when the book of 703 sonnets put this modern American Robert Burns on the literary scene with hurrahs in 1934. And they know *Beyond Dark Hills*, the autobiography written at age twenty-four as a theme paper at Vanderbilt; *Taps for Private Tussie*, with sales of more than two-and-a-half million copies; *Album of Destiny*, a favorite of Stuart's, poems on which he worked for eleven years; *Mongrel Mettle*, an autobiography of a dog; *Foretaste of Glory*, when Greenup folks mistook the northern lights of aurora borealis as the Judgment; *The Thread That Runs So True*, one of this country's all-time popular works on teachers and teaching; *The Good Spirit of Laurel Ridge*, where Stuart gives us one of his favorite people, Theopolis Akers, "Old Opp"; *The Year of My Rebirth*, which chronicles his comeback from the 1954 heart attack; *God's Oddling*, the story of his father, and *Daughter of the Legend*, about the Melungeons of East Tennessee. And more, including juvenilia and ten volumes of collected short stories.

In *Daughter of the Legend*, Stuart moves an earlier story, "Sylvania is Dead," to Melungeon country. Sylvania weighs 650 pounds. She buys corn from hill farmers and sells it back to them as moonshine. "Revenooers," when they catch her, can't take her to jail because they can't get her through the door of her cabin, and if they could, how would they get her off Sanctuary Mountain? When she dies they have to remove the chimney to get her out. It takes twenty men to lower her coffin into the ground with ten plowlines.

Sylvania is one in a large tribe of notable Stuart characters that mark Stuart as a master of the tall-tale. Another is Uncle Casper in



the story by that name, whose moustache "is a tuft of dead bull grass, neatly pruned," his nose "a sawed-off root of an oak tree," his hair "two spoiled waves of sickled timothy parted in the middle—the east wind blew a swath west and the west wind blew a swath east" and between the swaths is a cricket ravine.

And there is Old Red Mule, who loves mules, whose fight to save them leads to sledge hammer assaults on new-fangled tractors, and who dies in a barn eating mule feed with eighty-six mules he is trying to save from the glue factory. And Old Annis Bealer, who wears wool shirts and corduroy coats and trousers in July while working his farm because he believes that what would keep out cold would keep out heat—Old Annis the one who can think through steel. And Uglybird Skinner. And one character whose mouth looks like "a deserted coal mine propped up with decayed posts," reason enough to want your nip of corn liquor first, before the jug is passed around.

Some of these folks, many of them drawn from real people in Stuart's home country, including Shan Powderjay, Stuart's alter ego and boy narrator, are discussed at the Greenbo Sessions. Jennings R. Mace of the U.S. Air Force Academy examines links between the humor of Stuart and the Old Southwest. Mace's ultimate compliment is to suggest that Huck Finn and Jim did not miss the turn at Cairo. "Instead, they made their way up the Ohio River. Huck dropped Jim off at Cincinnati and continued up the Ohio until he saw . . . the Little Sandy. Weary of the tranquil life on the raft, Huck put ashore, found the surrounding hills to his liking, and settled down. He married, finally, and took up farming; he also changed his name to Powderjay. Several generations later the Powderjays were firmly part of the landscape, firmly linked with the soil, but they still remember the raftsmen who started the family. Shan remembers him, and so does his rowdy brother, Finn."

Papers read at the Greenbo Sessions by the scholars and historians bring Stuart into clearest focus yet as a primitivist, romanticist, humanist and humorist who has paid little attention to literary fads.

With Faulkner, he is not modish and, Tate aside, not self-conscious. Like Faulkner, Stuart listens to the voices of his people, and finds in his own little postage stamp of native soil enough riches to take more than one lifetime to put on paper. Like Faulkner, he is an original. Ruel E. Foster said it best in Twayne's



*Jesse Stuart*: "[He] is a genuine, original, marvelously fecund writing man; and the unduly fretful twentieth century has not quite known what to do with him, how to classify him, what attitude to take towards him. As a result, it has so far evaded the questions, shaken its head, and refused to talk about him. But the world cannot ignore Jesse Stuart permanently, for he is a kind of great natural force, like Niagara Falls or Old Faithful."<sup>5</sup>

Twelve years after that was written, many critics still don't know what to make of Stuart. M. Thomas Inge does. He places Stuart somewhere between Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner. "Unlike Stuart, Caldwell has no compassion for or humane interest in the characters of his creation, all of whom respond to some instinctive level of passion and lust rather than humanizing principle," Inge says at Greenbo. "Like Faulkner, Stuart believes in the possibility of human endurance and in such old fashioned values as love, honor, pride, and sacrifice, words which the followers of Hemingway found obscene because of modern society's misuse of the words in defense of warfare. But both Stuart and Faulkner reaffirm faith in human nature, man's potential for good, and his ability to live up to that best that is within him. He belongs with the yea-sayers . . . He belongs with those writers who have viewed human nature at its most miserable but who nevertheless posit a comic view of man and his potential for salvation. He belongs in the tradition of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dickens, Mark Twain and Faulkner."

Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark finds that "the genius of Jesse Stuart is that of giving sacrosanct to the commonplace of people and nature moving from season to season, from the stages of life with the regularity of the quarterings of the moon, and accepting it all with a certain earthy dignity and calmness which neutralizes the bitterness and harshness of the process. . . . Whatever the critics may say about the writings of Jesse Stuart will be largely meaningless if they overlook this simple recognition of the inner struggles of simple people," Clark finds. "No other American author has so voluminously recorded a near literal interpretation of a regional mind."

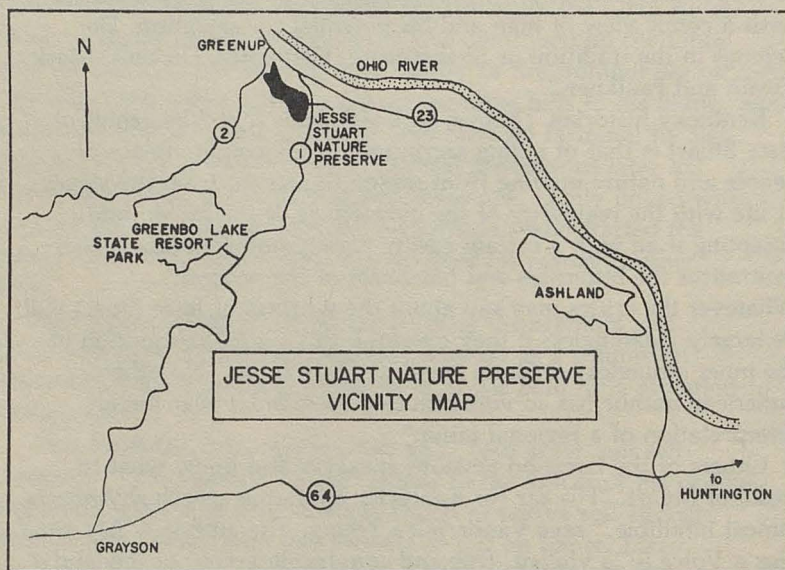
Others of the Greenbo Sessions speakers also know what to make of Stuart. "His ear for Kentucky mountain speech rhythms is almost infallible," says Vanderbilt's Young. The author of *My Land Has a Voice* is "a violent, true and convincing voice" of the land that is his. Baylor University's LeMaster finds that Stuart is "a



modernist in his rejection of contemporary values, a humanist in his effort to create a habitable world, and a symbolist in technique." Wade Hall of Bellarmine College makes a case for "truth is funny," and places Stuart in the classical tradition of American humorists. And Wilma Dykeman, who walks tall as one of southern Appalachia's gifted commentators, has a word of caution. "Let's don't make the mistake of emphasizing Stuart's devotion to the land and his own experiences to the exclusion of the intellectual experience. Anti-intellectualism he has always battled. Appalachia needs this, too."

Sherwood Anderson sent Faulkner home from New Orleans to write about his little patch of Yoknapatawpha. Donald Davidson sent Stuart home from Vanderbilt to do the same with W-Hollow, which Greenbo Sessions visitors see with Stuart's brother, James M. Stuart, as guide.

But the visitors hear first about the new Jesse Stuart Foundation, which is unique in its combination of literary perspectives and conservation. The public foundation has come into management of Stuart's literary estate and his acres of lush meadows and timberlands teeming with wildlife under a \$1.5 million half-gift,



Courtesy of the Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission



half-purchase arrangement with the Stuarts, and will operate and manage the holdings as the Jesse Stuart Nature Preserve. This new Kentucky treasure, open to the public, will be the setting for literary, cultural, historical and natural history research, with facilities ultimately that will bring together Stuart's manuscripts, papers and memorabilia.

The foundation, a living memorial to Stuart, has as its major functions the preservation and maintenance of the W-Hollow property, and perpetuation "of the literary achievements and works of Jesse Stuart, both published and unpublished, for all people who may now and in the future wish to read, to enjoy, to study, and otherwise to experience them as a significant part of the culture of Appalachia and the Nation."<sup>6</sup> Under this agreement, the rights and a share in royalties of Stuart's work are signed over to the foundation, which will decide whether unpublished materials should be published or previously published materials reprinted, copyrights permitting.

Under the gift-purchase, the Stuarts donated half their property to the state with the other half being bought from them with federal contingency funds that provide for projects of national significance.

The plan for the transfer of the Stuart holdings was worked out by the Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission and the foundation. The nine-room Stuart home—which in its original state was the small log cabin home of Stuart during 1916 to 1918 and which, with additions of rooms, has been their home since Jesse and Naomi Deane Norris were married in 1939—will remain under ownership of the Stuarts for their lifetimes. The W-Hollow area has three other homes or homesites where he and his family lived beginning in 1909. A fifth home, his log cabin birthplace, burned years ago. It was on property adjoining Stuart's present land, which the foundation hopes to acquire. Plans are already being discussed for possible on-site restoration of the birthplace.

Incapacitated as Stuart is with paralysis, he and Mrs. Stuart have thus seen to it that their physical environment will be preserved for everyone to enjoy. There will be no rape of this land for strip mining, nor for subdivisions, nor even many years from now for fast-food emporiums or shopping centers. There will be no cutting of trees except to protect the forests. "No Hunting" signs will be posted in perpetuity.

Stuart, who has long championed preservation and reverence of



the land, has never received the recognition he deserves in soil and water conservation, G. Sam Piatt of the *Ashland* (Kentucky) *Daily Independent* reports. Piatt has told of a onetime visit to Stuart by a state official who sought to enroll him in a timber management program. Stuart would have none of it. "If you take out all the dead trees, where will the owls live?" he asked. W-Hollow today is a vast wildlife sanctuary. The Stuart's kitchen door is a gathering place for all manner of little creatures—groundhogs, woodchucks, squirrels and birds—for handouts from Mrs. Stuart. About the only visitor she won't tolerate, which Jesse Stuart does, is the harmless blacksnake.

Generations will be in the Stuarts' debt for this prize habitat that gave forth the stories and poems. The percoon and whitetop will continue to bloom in W-Hollow, and deer and bobcat and small wildlife thrive in a rich Appalachian and national legacy born of one man's hard work and gifts of imagination and creativity.

The holdings began with fifty acres of land that the Stuart family worked as tenant farmers. It was land-locked, with no roads in or out. Jesse Stuart bought their way out with teaching and lecturing, stories and poems.

Mitchell Stuart was a farmer. He never went to school. He worked in the coal mines and on the railroad. He was a Methodist and a Republican. Martha Hilton Stuart went only through the second grade. She was a Baptist and a Democrat. His father served with the Union Army, hers with the Confederacy. Stuart grew up hearing some lively discussions between his parents. They sleep today on Plum Grove Hill. Stuart has sung high praises of his parents throughout his autobiographical work, calling them the least book-educated but the best earth-educated people he has known.

Cratis Williams of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, has traced the sturdy pioneer stock from which Stuart and his Appalachian countrymen are descended. Nearly sixty percent of the region's first citizens came from Anglo-Celtic forebears who had ruled Britain before the Romans arrived. History records their movements to Scotland and Ireland, and the arrival of the Scotch-Irish in America and Appalachia. "They were among the most literate immigrants to the New World, but years of isolation in the mountains, together with the feuds engendered by the Civil War, made schooling and contact with the rest of the nation



difficult."<sup>7</sup> It is a story that is as recent as Stuart's parents and his boyhood.

Williams credits Jesse Stuart, Alabama-born James Still and Harriette Arnow, who know Appalachia from within, with setting right the chronicle of Appalachia created by outsiders who dealt in stereotypes in their presentations of "spittle-bearded mountain folk" who spoke "the prototypical dialect" long after such things as homespun dress, long-barrel rifles and feuds were representative. Beginning with such writers as these three, Williams tells us, "Appalachian folk began to be presented as real persons with cultural identities, traditions, problems and concerns that are peculiarly their own. Individuals rather than pasteboard cutouts, characters rather than caricatures, occupy the stage, no longer hung with those strings of shucky-beans and festoons of pepperpods that were the perennial props of the outsiders who wrote about us."<sup>8</sup>

Martha and Mitch Stuart's seven children were all born in log cabins. Two died young, and the five who lived walked two miles to Plum Grove School where eight grades met in one room under one teacher. They walked three miles to Greenup High School. They grubbed a living from the hills, largely with corn and tobacco and homegrown food, and sheep and other livestock. They were poor, but self-sufficient and full of pride. Jesse was the first of his family to go to college. Today, James M. Stuart says, sixteen Stuarts—from a family that can remember no roads, no radio, no plumbing, no consolidated schools—have twenty-one degrees from one Kentucky university alone, Morehead State.

Jesse Stuart was teaching at age seventeen at Cane Creek School (Lonesome Valley School in his writing), before he had finished high school. He entered high school with only twenty-two months of elementary education. He played in the first football game he ever saw. He left home with a street carnival, and worked two summers in a steel mill. He enrolled at Lincoln Memorial University at Harrogate, Tennessee, and, during the three years he was there, received a total of \$2.00 from home. He left with a degree and with a debt to the university of \$100.50, which he soon paid. Then came graduate work at George Peabody College and Vanderbilt.

It is a story well documented in *Beyond Dark Hills* and elsewhere in Stuart. At Vanderbilt, he was the only farmer among the cluster of "parlor agrarians," as Ruel E. Foster calls the *I'll Take My Stand* fraternity that followed closely the Fugitives movement



which changed our poetry and criticism. Jesse Stuart went home without a master's degree after one year at Vanderbilt, to farm and teach and write. He took Donald Davidson's advice, as Frank H. Leavell records it, to stop imitating Carl Sandburg, and to start sending poems to the big magazines instead of just the little ones. H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* published him, and the rest is literary history. Teaching and schools were so much a part of Stuart's experience through 1940 that some have wondered whether he is a teacher who writes or a writer who teaches. His love affair with teaching began in 1924 when he taught a summer term at Cane Creek elementary. He taught one year at Warnock High School. At twenty-four, he was the youngest superintendent of county schools in the Commonwealth. He was at various times principal at McKell and at Greenup. There was one year of teaching remedial English.

As late as 1960, Stuart was saying in a McGraw-Hill author's questionnaire that most of his life had been spent in education. Writing, he said, "except recently," had been a sideline. "I just about have to do both, teach and write." He also lectured widely.

But his formal connections with academia in the last forty years, while impressive, have been sparse. The record is two years back at Greenup city schools as superintendent and another year at McKell as principal. Then there was a summer teaching stint at the University of Nevada, one year as visiting lecturer at American University in Cairo, writer in residence two years at Eastern Kentucky University, and seven summers as director of a three-week Jesse Stuart Creative Writing Workshop at Murray (Kentucky) State University.

There was Navy service during World War II. Years later, he traveled abroad on a State Department goodwill tour.

And there are the awards—a Guggenheim Fellowship and literary prizes including the Jeanette Sewal Davis poetry prize, American Institute of Arts and Letters and Thomas Jefferson Southern Awards, 1960 outstanding poet honors from the Academy of American Poets, and fourteen honorary doctorates. The National Education Association selected *The Thread That Runs So True* as the best book of 1949. He has been poet laureate of Kentucky since 1954, and has seen a high school named for him across state in Louisville. In 1974 he was included in James Woodress's *American Fiction, 1900-1950* as one of forty-four writers "who seem to be the most significant producers of fiction



during the first half of the twentieth century."

Today a trails system of seven W-Hollow tours relating to Stuart's prose and poetry and life has already been opened by the Jesse Stuart Foundation for conducted group visitation arranged through Donald F. Harker, Jr., director of the Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission at Frankfort.

And with a copy of Stuart's "There Shall Not Be Left Here One Stone Upon Another," from the July 1977 *Filson Club History Quarterly*, and a Greenup County road map, the visitor can see the locales of other Stuart fiction and autobiography which James M. Stuart now shows Greenbo Sessions people. The Stuart sisters, Sophia Keeney, Mary Nelson and Glennis Liles, are there as hostesses.

If a Stuart country visit begins with Stuart's W-Hollow home, the next stop is Plum Grove Church and cemetery, Stuart's "city of the dead." From Plum Grove, it's back to State Route 1 and six miles south to Argillite (Argill in the books), where Naomi Deane Stuart's ancestors established the first iron furnace in the county. And on to Hunnewell and the site of Cane Creek School. About all that is left of the school is one stone upon another—fieldstone rocks piled two high for corner foundations. That's all, except floor joists, crumbling remains of the floor, and pieces of a pot-bellied stove that chased the cold of many a Kentucky winter.

On now to Hopewell and Mrs. Stuart's girlhood home and church. Then back to Route 1, Low Gap Road and Route 2 over to the site of Warnock High School (Winston in the books), a chicken house there now, the Ott Taylor house where Stuart boarded, and the Mt. Olivet Church of Old Regular Baptists of Jesus Christ.

Then to State Route 7 and Tygart Valley, which Harry M. Caudill calls one of the most charming places left in America, to South Shore and McKell High School. McKell is the setting for *Mr. Gallion's School* and part of *The Thread That Runs So True*. And across the Ohio River to Portsmouth, where Stuart taught the first classes of high school remedial English in the country, using *The Portsmouth Times* as textbook.

From there, it is down U.S. 23 to Greenup, the "hanging tree" gone now where the Little Sandy enters the Ohio. In Greenup, the sights include an eight-foot granite monument to Stuart erected by townspeople on the Courthouse lawn in 1955, Leslie's Drugstore where Stuart's books have been on sale for thirty years, the site of



the old Greenup High School, and the new Greenup County High School at old Riverton, where Stuart in 1926 was in the first class to graduate, the "mansion" where forty-six Tussies fritter away Kim Tussie's \$10,000 insurance before Kim shows up alive.

For untold numbers who have been taken on this tour by the Stuarts over the years, the circle ends back at W-Hollow, home to four generations of Stuarts.

It is there, during the Greenbo Sessions visit, that Stuart remembers aloud the Vanderbilt days. Another Kentuckian, Robert Penn Warren, had been an influence and encouragement, as had Donald Davidson, Edwin Mims and John Donald Wade. The Fugitives had scattered when Stuart got there. John Crowe Ransom was in Europe on a Guggenheim. The Agrarians had already published their *Stand*. But the Fugitive and Agrarian movements had drawn him there, and he had taken a course in "the Novel" taught by young Warren. After the one year there, much of it on one meal a day, and after his master's thesis on John Fox, Jr., his old Oliver typewriter and a cache of stories and poems burned in a dormitory fire, costing him also a job as janitor, Stuart borrowed a dollar from a friend and hitchhiked home to stay.

"If they'd have said at Vanderbilt that something like this (the Greenbo Sessions) would happen someday, nobody would've believed it," Stuart says as his wheelchair is turned toward the house, the visit over. "Out of that class in the novel, I'm the only one who wrote a novel."

The sun is out of sight beyond the ridge. A breeze moves through the old tiger lilies and the elder tops. Sugar Lump, the pet woodchuck, scampers under the smokehouse in which are stacked old seventy-eight discs of Beethoven, antiques of decades of accompaniment while Stuart penned the legend of the land that is his. A rooster crows far off, and of course we think of "Nest Egg." He wrote the story in Mrs. R. E. Hatton's high school English class at Greenup. It earned twenty-eight A's for Stuart and friends in Kentucky and Tennessee schools before it was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February 1944, forever ruining it as a theme paper.

It is time to go. The eye is filled with seeing but not the ear with hearing this man who had Warren for teacher and who came home to write his novel.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ruel E. Foster, *Jesse Stuart* (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Jesse Stuart, "This Land is Mine," *A Jesse Stuart Reader*, ed. Jesse Stuart, foreword by Max Bogart (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), p. 297.

<sup>3</sup>John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds., *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 270.

<sup>4</sup>Fain and Young, p. 351.

<sup>5</sup>Foster, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup>*Description of Activities of the Jesse Stuart Foundation* (Frankfort: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1979).

<sup>7</sup>David Meyer, "LDD Conference—Marketplace for Ideas, Information," *Appalachia*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (March-April, 1980), pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup>Cratis Williams, "The Appalachian Experience," *Appalachian Heritage*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1979), pp. 4-11.